

Metonymy in Grammar Revisited

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My characterization of metonymy to be presented in 2.2 is intended to (1) deal with the widest range of metonymic phenomena, (2) explain why metonymy should be as pervasive in language as most cognitive linguists would like to think it is, and (3) show that a broad array of grammatical phenomena, many of which have traditionally been treated separately, can all be seen as grounded in metonymy.

1. The Ubiquity of Metonymy

(4) Where are you parked?

(5) Saikin mata Murakami Haruki-o yomihajimeta.

'I've started reading Murakami Haruki again.'

(6) This is us.

(7) Nagano-wa tanoshikatta desune.

'Nagano was fun, wasn't it?'

The traditional rhetoric defines metonymy as a figure of speech whereby the name of one entity e^1 is used to refer to another entity e^2 which is contiguous to e^1 . Taylor (1995: 122)

(8) My pencil broke.

(9) Jitensha-o koida.

'Lit. I pumped my bicycle.'

'I pedaled my bicycle.'

cf. pedaru-o kogu

'pump the pedals'

(10) a. I opened the door/the window.

b. I walked through the door/put my head through the window.

(11) a. The phone kept ringing.

b. No one bothered to pick up the phone.

- (12) a. I made myself comfortable in the sofa.
 b. I found the sofa comfortable.
- (13) a. Heyajuu-ni hon-ga chirakatteiru.
 'There are books scattered all over the room.'
 b. Heya-ga hon-de chirakatteiru.
 'The room is a mess because there are books scattered all over it.'
- (14) a. Tsumetai mizu-ga ha-ni/Kemuri-ga me-ni shimiru.
 'Cold water/Smoke gets into and affects one's teeth/eyes.'
 b. Ha/Me-ga shimiru.
 'One's teeth/eyes hurt because liquid or gas has gotten into them.'

shimiru: [liquid or gas gets into a body part, causing an unpleasant sensation]

An expression's **profile** is the entity it designates, or refers to, and as such is a focus of attention within the overall conception evoked, which is called its **base**.

2. Fundamental Cognitive Abilities Underlying Metonymy

2.1. The Reference-point ability

- (15) Clearly, then, we have the ability to invoke the conception of one entity in order to establish “mental contact” with another. The entity first invoked is called a **reference point**, and one accessed via a reference point is referred to as a **target**. A particular reference point affords potential access to many different targets. Collectively, this set of potential targets constitute the reference point's **dominion**. Langacker (2008: 83-84)
- (16) [T]he entity that is normally designated by a metonymic expression serves as a reference point affording mental access to the desired target (i.e., the entity actually being referred to). Langacker (1993: 30)
- (4) Where are you parked? (R: the addressee T: the car you drove to get to where you are)
- (9) Jitensha-o koida (R: the bicycle T: the pedals)

2.2. The ability to access and manipulate "encyclopedic" knowledge

(17) The encyclopedic view of meaning denies the existence of any precise or rigid boundary between semantics and pragmatics or between linguistic and extralinguistic knowledge. Instead, expressions are seen as meaningful by virtue of evoking multiple realms of knowledge and experience—I call these **cognitive domains**—in a flexible, open-ended manner. Langacker (1997: 235)

- (11) a. The phone kept ringing.
 b. No one bothered to pick up the phone.

(5) Saikin mata Murakami Haruki-o yomihajimeta.
 'I've started reading Haruki Murakami again.'

- (18) a. Murakami Haruki-ga daisuki desu.
 'I like Haruki Murakami very much.'
 b. Murakami Haruki-o takaku hyouka suru
 'think highly of Haruki Murakami'
 c. Murakami Haruki-o kenkyuu suru
 'do research on Haruki Murakami'

(19) **Metonymy can be defined as occurring when different uses of a given expression, while activating a single shared frame, highlight different facets of that frame.**

2.3. The fate of metonymy in Langacker's network model¹ for polysemy²

(20) Figurative language is generally ignored in current theories; at best it is handled by special, ad hoc devices. Yet it would be hard to find anything more pervasive and fundamental in language, even (I maintain) in the domain of grammatical structure; if figurative language were systematically eliminated from our data base, little if any data would remain. We therefore need a way of conceiving and describing grammatical structure that accommodates figurative language as a natural, expected

¹ It should be borne in mind that this model was designed right from the outset to apply not just to lexical semantics but to all domains of language structure (Langacker 1987, 1988, 1999).

² It should be noted that Langacker would be the first to admit that this model has its limitations. In fact, he has proposed an alternative model intended to overcome some of these limitations (Langacker 2006).

phenomenon rather than a special, problematic one. An adequate conceptual framework for linguistic analysis should view figurative language not as a problem but as part of the solution. Langacker (1987: 1)³

- (21) [W]hen Langacker (1990) presented the network model, a model supposed to capture meaning extension from a prototypical sense, there was no place for metonymy.⁴ Seto (2003: 203)
- (22) Figure 6 shows that the extension from the prototype is exclusively metaphoric and that the schema C is the extraction of the commonality of A and B. Seto (2003: 203)
- (23) Langacker started to change his position later, gradually and tantalizingly, until he finally decided to give metonymy a place in the network model when he referred to “*extension* (generally metaphorical and metonymic)” (Langacker 1995b: 111). Seto (2003: 204)
- (24) However, the inclusion of metonymy in the network model poses a serious theoretical problem: B, the extension from the prototype A, is not a uniform node because the extension processes of metaphor and metonymy are different, so the status of schema has to change accordingly. While node C continues to be able to maintain a schematic relation with the prototype and a metaphor, such a relation is no longer possible with the prototype and a metonymy, because the prototype is related to its metonymic extension on the basis of contiguity (the E-relation)⁵ in the world. There is no similarity to be extracted from the two. Therefore, so far as metonymy is concerned, the network model stops working. Seto (2003: 204)
- (25) Despite their qualitative distinctness, extensions of this sort are readily accommodated in the present model. They are analyzable as a special case of extensions motivated by perceived resemblance. Langacker (1987: 384)

³ In fact, Langacker’s keen interest in figurative language goes back even further, at least to Langacker (1976), in which he extensively discussed the ubiquity and significance of figurative language, at one point (p. 343) going as far as to say, “Virtually all language is figurative to some degree.”

⁴ For a detailed and incisive critique of this majority view, see Tanaka (2021).

⁵ E is short for “entity-based.” Seto (2003: 196) defines metonymy as follows: Metonymy is a referential transfer phenomenon based on spatiotemporal contiguity as conceived by the speaker between an entity and another in the (real) world.

(26) In the case of *bedes*, the notion of a person keeping track of a cycle of prayers by counting the balls on a rosary figured prominently in the encyclopedic description of both [PRAYERS] and [BEADS] during Middle English times. Langacker (1987: 384)

(27) In the operative domain, both [PRAYERS] and [BEADS] evoke the conception of a one-to-one correspondence between prayers in a cycle and balls on a rosary; they contrast only in the choice of profile. If we abstract away from this point of difference, and consider the one-to-one correspondence without imposing a profile, the resulting conception is schematic for both [PRAYERS] and [BEADS]: it is compatible with their specifications and reflects their extensive commonality. Since it is mediated by a schema, the extension is quite comparable to those based on similarity; the qualitative difference that leads us to speak of association rather than resemblance derives from the fundamental contribution of profiling to the semantic value of an expression. Association is therefore analyzable as the attenuated similarity that remains when this critical specification is suspended. Langacker (1987: 384)

3. Metonymy in Grammar

3.1. Metonymy-based shifts in meaning underlying grammatical variability

(28) a. I locked the door (of my car).

b. I locked my car.

(29) *lock*: [I <firmly close and fix shut the entrance to/exit from a place> (e.g. (28a)) -->

II <make the place impossible to get into/escape from/reach into> (e.g. (28b))]⁶

(30) a. He was locked in the cell for a week.

b. She got angry and locked me out.

c. Everything of value must be locked away.

(31) *lock*: [I <firmly close and fix shut the entrance to/exit from a place> (e.g. (28a)) -->

II <make the place impossible to get into/escape from/reach into> (e.g. (28b))

--> III <keep someone/something from getting into/escaping from the place>

⁶ Throughout this talk an arrow indicates a cause-effect and/or means-end relationship, the latter being a special case of the former when the end is achieved.

or <make someone/something in the place inaccessible> (e.g. (28c))]

(32) I locked myself out (of my car).

(33) a. I squeezed the toothpaste tube.

b. I squeezed a bit more out of the tube.

(34) a. They voted for/against her.

b. They voted her into/out of office.

(35) a. Bill signed his name.

b. The President signed a bill.

c. The President signed the bill into law.

(36) a. She edited the film.

b. She edited his voice out of the film.

(37) [I <press X hard> --> II <get Y out of X>]

(38) a. Kawa-ga yuttari nagareteita.

'The river was flowing slowly.'

b. Ookina momo-ga nagarete kita.

'A big peach came floating down the river.'

(39) a. toire-ni mizu-o nagasu

'flush water through the toilet'

b. toire-ni mono-o nagasu

'flush something down the toilet'

c. toire-o nagasu

'flush the toilet'

(40) *nagareru*: [I <liquid or gas moves steadily and continuously in one direction> (e.g. (38a)) --> II [something in it moves in the same direction> (e.g. (38b))]

(41) *nagasu*: [I <cause (a large amount of) water to pass through a place> (e.g. (39a)) --> II <remove something from the place> (e.g. (39b)) --> III <clean the place> (e.g. (39c))]

(42) a. Haisui kan-ni gomi-ga tsumatteiru.

'There is some garbage stuck in the drain.'

b. Haisui kan-ga tsumatteiru.

'The drain is clogged up.'

- (43) *tsumaru*: [I <something gets stuck in a tube designed to move liquid or gas along>
(e.g. (42a)) --> II <it becomes difficult or impossible for the tube to serve
its function> (e.g. 42b)]

3.2. The benefactive alternation

- (44) a. She made coffee for all of us.
b. She made us all coffee.
(45) a. Let me get some water for you.
b. Let me get you some water.

3.3. The *tough* alternation

- (46) a. It is difficult to read this book.
b. This book is difficult to read.
(47) a. It is comfortable to work in this office.
b. This office is comfortable to work in.
(48) a. I made myself comfortable in the sofa. (= (12a))
b. I found the sofa comfortable. (= (12b))
(49) a. They became suspicious of his behavior.
b. They found his behavior suspicious.

3.4. The English resultative and the Japanese passive

- (50) a. I painted the door.
b. I painted the door green.
(51) a. I pushed the door.
b. I pushed the door open.
(52) a. I shouted at the top of my voice.
b. I shouted myself hoarse.
(53) a. Hanako-wa Taro-o nagutta.
'Hanako hit Taro.'
b. Taro-wa Hanako-ni nagurareta.

- 'Taro was hit by Hanako.'
- (54) a. Hanako-wa naita.
'Hanako cried.'
- b. Taro-wa Hanako-ni nakareta.
'Taro was adversely affected by Hanako's crying.'
- (55) The semantic pole of the English resultative constructional schema: <X performs an action, directly resulting in some change in Y> (X and Y respectively profiled by the subject and object nominals; the resultative predicate specifying the resulting change)
- (56) The semantic pole of the Japanese passive constructional schema: <X gets affected by Y performing an action involving X in some way> (X and Y respectively profiled by the subject and *ni*-marked nominals)
- (57) a. I ate a whole pizza.
b. I ate myself sick.
- (58) a. Taro-ga watashi-no nikki-o yonda.
'Taro read my diary.'
- b. (watashi-wa) Taro-ni nikki-o yomareta.
'I was adversely affected by Taro's reading my diary.'
- (59) When Jennie's dog died, she cried her eyes out all afternoon.
- (60) Don't get cornered by Mrs. Flapjaw. She'll talk your ear off.
- (61) I work my fingers to the bone and what thanks do I get?
- (62) Our son is growing so fast he'll soon be eating us out of house and home.
- (63) The public, the press, and the industry won't give them the space they need to achieve sustainable recovery. Downey, for example, was offered acting roles almost immediately upon leaving prison. We could, in effect, be loving these people to death. "Fame and Addiction: Star Treatment" *World News Tonight with Peter Jennings*, May 4, 2001
- (64) From there it would be short work to read the full English text of Professor Crickson's message, sneezed around the world. *River Out of Eden: A Darwinian View of Life*, p.18

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